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May 9, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

The United States Navy recently operated a “Digital Ambassador initiative...from October 2022 to March 2023” to reach potential new military recruits.¹ As part of this operation, the Navy used a “drag queen influencer” in an attempt to persuade new candidates to join the military.² Despite the Navy previously briefing the House Armed Services Committee (“HASC”) that such a Digital Ambassador program *did not* exist, it now appears that not only did the Navy engage in this misguided effort, but it incomprehensibly believed that this woke campaign should become the defining face of the service.

Yeoman 2nd Class Joshua Kelley (“YN2 Kelley”), also a drag queen who “claims to have danced in drag for service officers on a number of different occasions,” announced in November 2022 he was selected as one of the Navy’s “Digital Ambassador[s].”³ While the Navy previously dismissed the existence of the ambassador program, a U.S. Navy spokesman recently embraced the effort in responding to the backlash, stating “Much like the country we serve, our Navy is stronger when we draw upon our diverse resources, skills, capabilities and talents. We remain committed to an inclusive environment.”⁴

As you know, estimates show that only 9% of America’s youth are interested in military service.⁵ This troubling reality has led to a missed recruiting goal of 15,000 or 25

¹ Jeffrey Clark, *US Navy platformed ‘drag queen influencer’ to attract youth to the military in hiring crisis*, FOX NEWS, May 3, 2023.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Aleks Phillips, *Harpy Daniels Doubles Down on Navy Drag Queen Backlash: ‘We’re Winning’*, NEWSWEEK, May 4, 2023.

⁵ Jimmy Byrn, *What if They Gave a War and Everybody Was Woke?*, WALL STREET JOURNAL, Jul. 29, 2022.

percent in the Army.⁶ The other branches barely hit their active-duty recruitment goals and are not on pace to recover any lost ground. The Navy “failed to reach targets for active duty and Reserve officers, along with Reserve enlisted personnel, in FY22.”⁷ This crisis even forced the Navy to increase its age limit from 39 to 41 to enhance recruitment.⁸

Perception is driving reality, and both current and former service members are alarmed at “a culture putting ‘wokeness’ before training and combat effectiveness.”⁹ Fringe ideologies and drag shows have no place in our military. Rather, the military should be focused on deterring adversaries and remaining a lethal force to defend the nation. Promoting drag shows does nothing to enhance military readiness and warfighting capabilities.

For the foregoing reasons, we request your response and any supporting documentation by May 23, 2023, to the following questions and document requests:

1. Confirmation that the Navy appointed YN2 Kelley as a “Digital Ambassador”;
2. A list of all Department of Defense (“DOD”) officials who participated in the decision to employ YN2 Kelley as a Navy Digital Ambassador;
3. Any data, studies, communications, and documentation relating to the effect, statistical results, and costs of drag shows and other “woke” initiatives on military recruitment and readiness;
4. Whether the Navy officially sanctions service member “influencers” on social media platforms;
5. A list of all officially sanctioned influencers throughout all the military services;
6. Calendar dates during which all military digital ambassadorship programs have occurred;
7. The Navy’s policy regarding digital ambassadors, like YN2 Kelley, appointed to promote the service;
8. All services’ policies for addressing service members or others portraying themselves as representing a service on social media, with or without authorization;

⁶ Lolita C. Baldor, *Army misses recruiting goal by 15,000 soldiers*, ARMY TIMES, Oct. 2, 2022.

⁷ Diana Stancy Correll, *Navy seeks to increase end strength amid recruitment challenges*, NAVY TIMES, Mar. 13, 2023.

⁸ Jay Price, *The Navy has raised its age limit as the U.S. military faces a deep recruiting slump*, NPR, Jan. 18, 2023.

⁹ Michael Lee, *Service members sound alarm against 'extremely woke' military*, FOX NEWS, Oct. 11, 2022.

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9. Any DOD instructions or instructions in development that govern performing in or authorizing drag shows, including any rules and regulations for service members engaging in such activity while actively serving in the Armed Forces;
10. Whether YN2 Kelley used official resources, including government-issued phones, computers, or other electronic equipment, in acting as the Navy's Digital Ambassador;
11. All officials who authorized YN2 Kelley to perform a drag show while serving aboard the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, USS Ronald Reagan, and all other instances when and where YN2 Kelley performed in drag for service members;¹⁰ and,
12. Explanation why DOD previously informed HASC that a digital ambassador program did not exist when in fact it did.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Jim Banks
Chairman
Subcommittee on Military Personnel



Mark Alford
Member of Congress
Subcommittee on Military Personnel

cc: The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

¹⁰ Note 1, *supra* (see photo inset purportedly showing YN2 Kelley performing a drag queen show aboard the USS Reagan).